

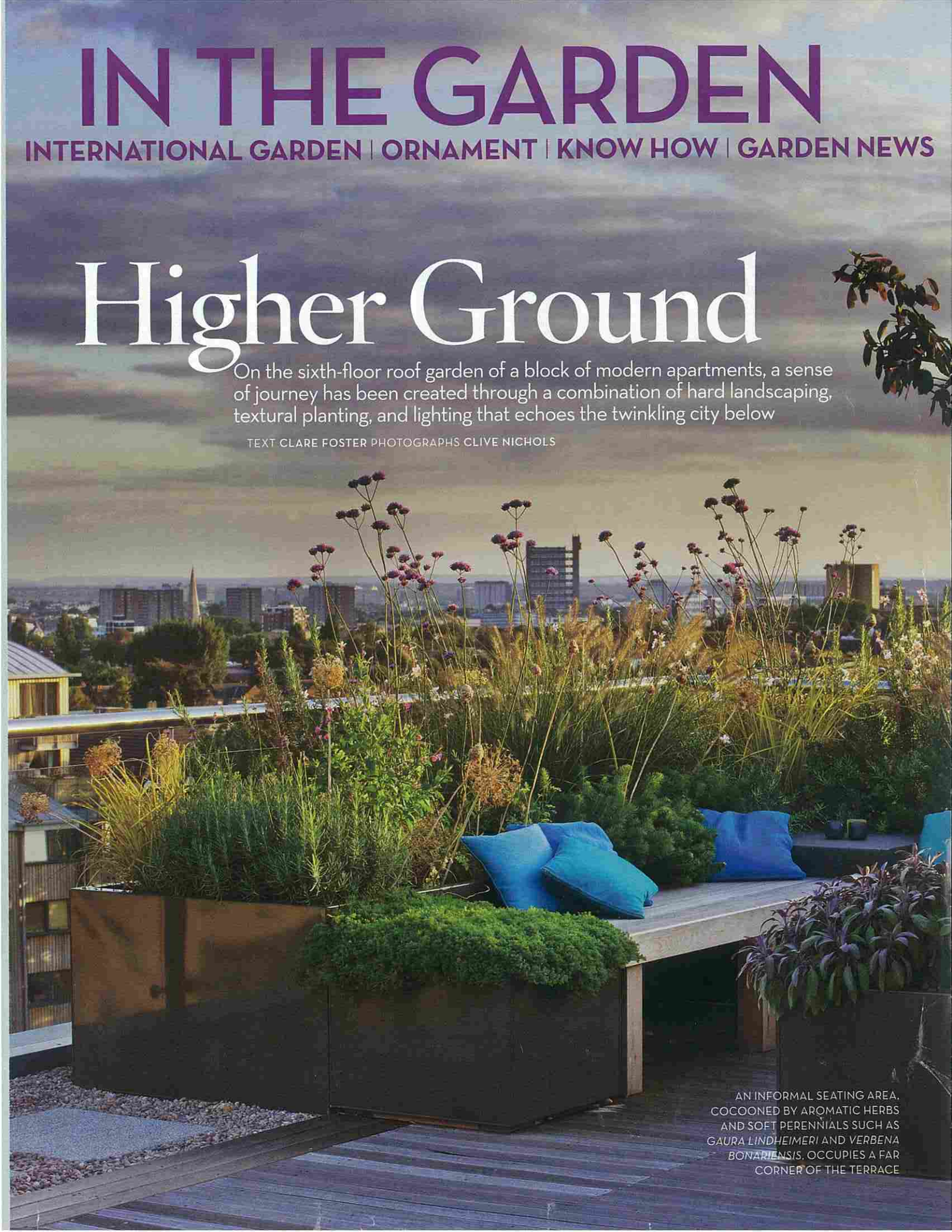
IN THE GARDEN

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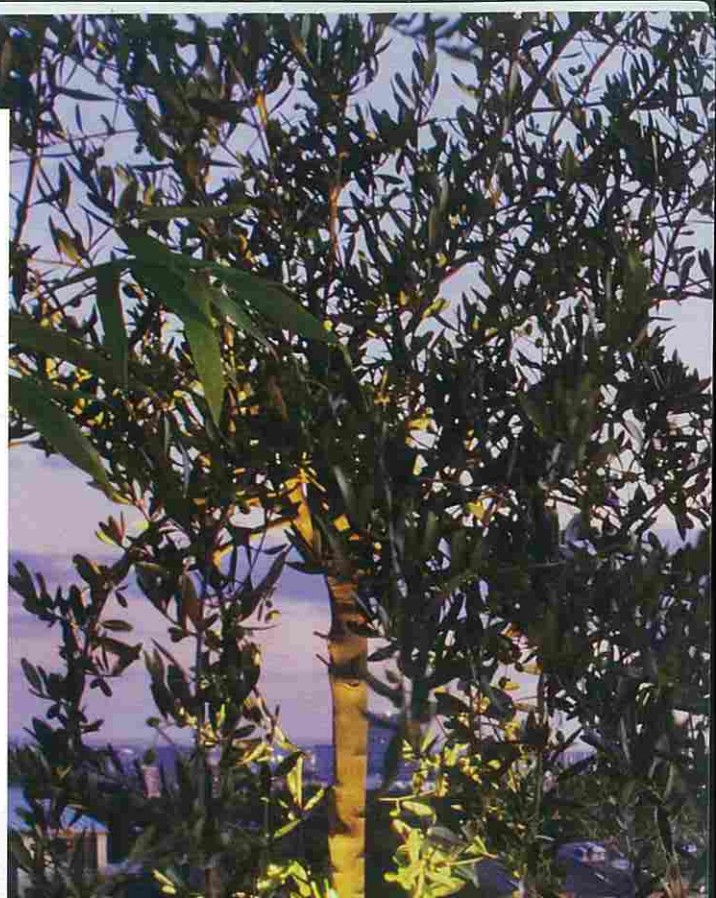
Higher Ground

On the sixth-floor roof garden of a block of modern apartments, a sense of journey has been created through a combination of hard landscaping, textural planting, and lighting that echoes the twinkling city below

TEXT CLARE FOSTER PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS

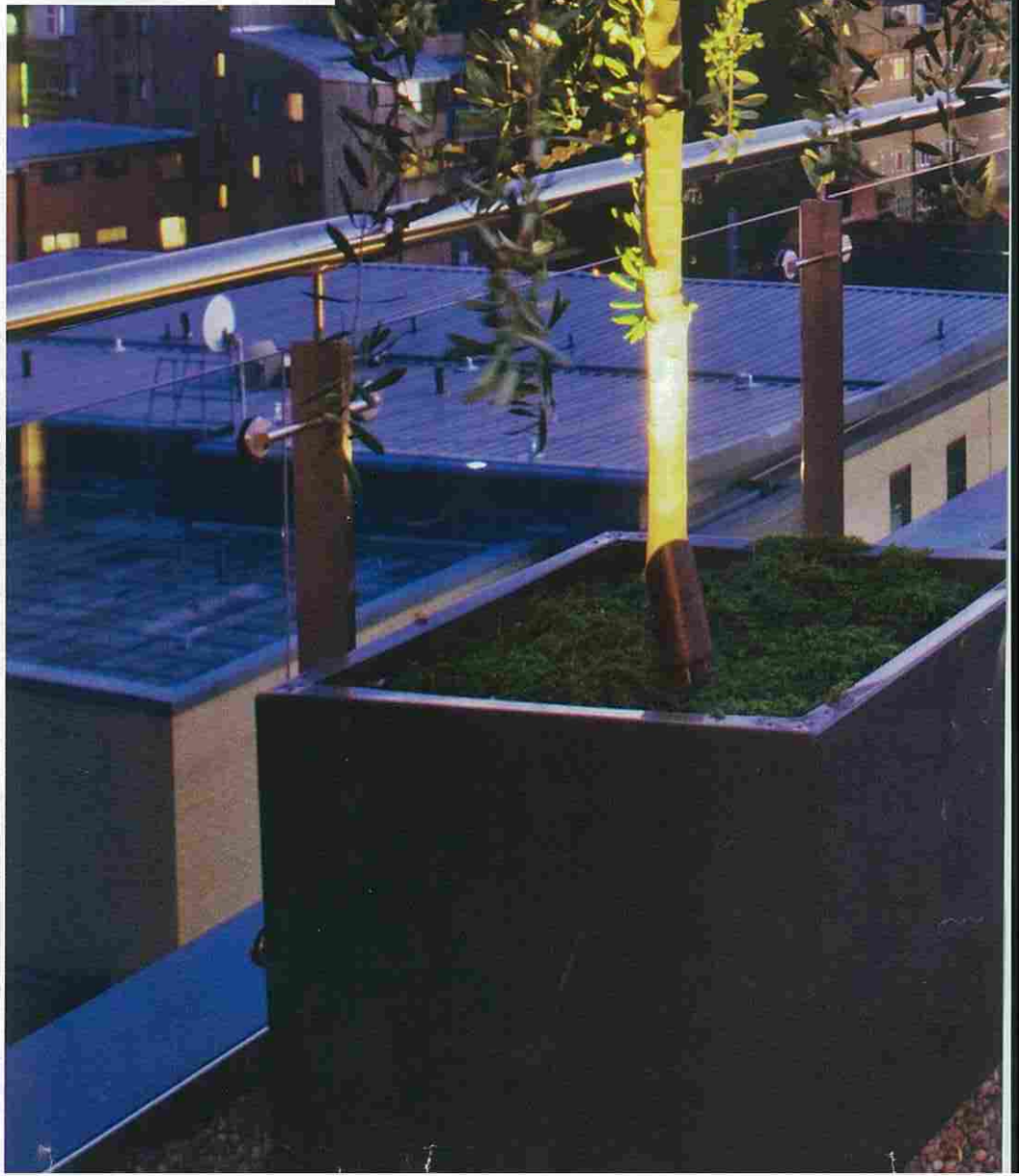


AN INFORMAL SEATING AREA, COCOONED BY AROMATIC HERBS AND SOFT PERENNIALS SUCH AS GAURA LINDHEIMERI AND VERBENA BONARIENSIS, OCCUPIES A FAR CORNER OF THE TERRACE



Large roof terraces in London are like gold dust, so when the couple who now owns this one first stepped outside the flat they were viewing in Hampstead two years ago, they were bowled over. On the sixth floor of a modern block, the huge 176-square-metre terrace offered sensational views across London, and although the previous owners had installed an expanse of decking, it was essentially a blank canvas waiting to be developed – without a plant in sight.

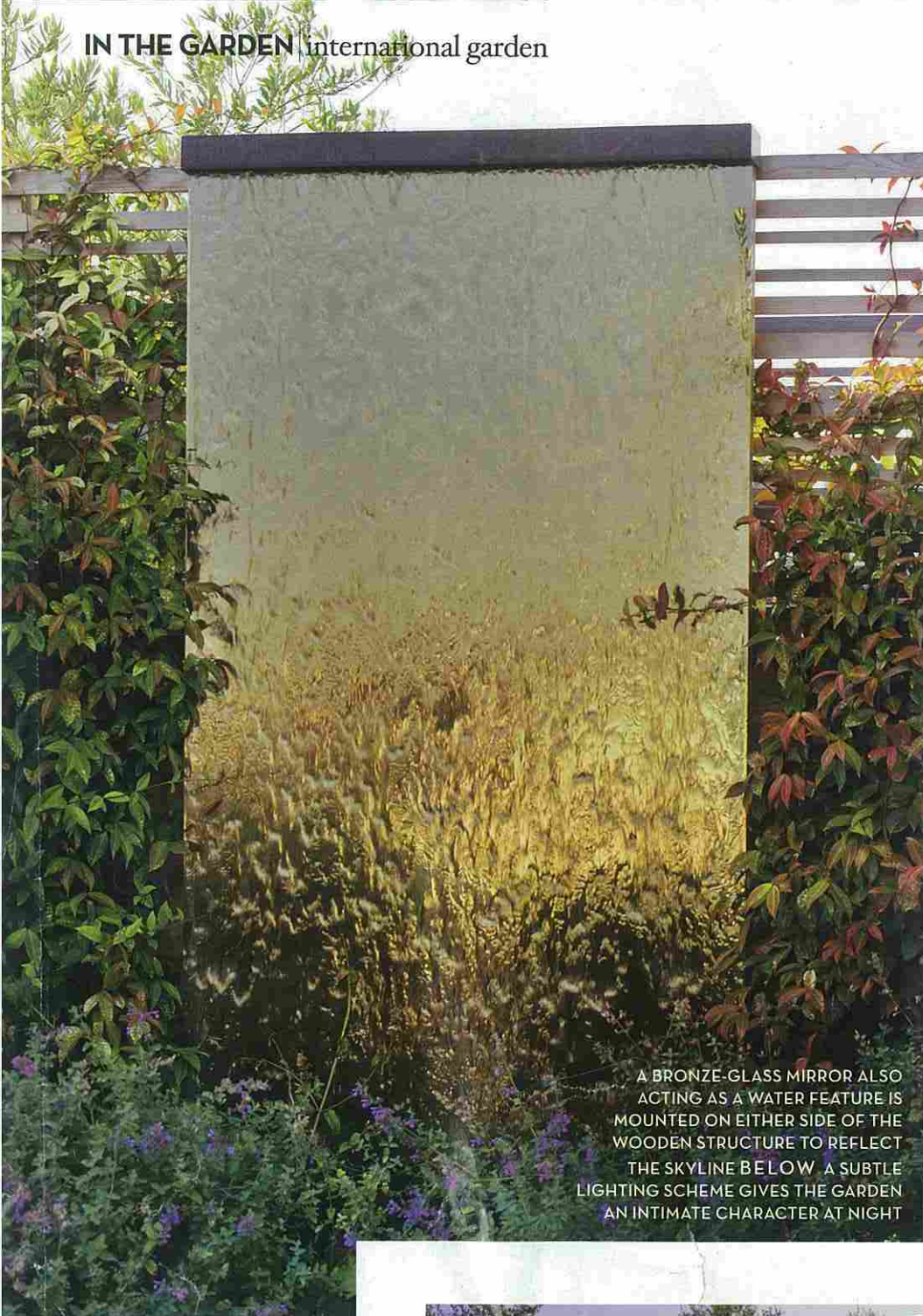
Coming from a house with a large garden, the owner wanted plants, but she also knew that she had to face the challenge of a completely new way of gardening, so she enlisted the help of garden designer Charlotte Rowe. Working to her clients' precise brief, Rowe developed a master plan that was to transform the space. From the apartment, the roof terrace is on permanent display through the floor-to-ceiling glass that wraps round one end of the building so it needed to have year-round visual appeal. Rowe's first step was to break up the stark, rectangular space with a modern-looking cedar structure that acts as an outdoor dining room and will be used eventually as a framework for climbing plants. The uprights of the wooden structure both restrict and frame different views, so rather than cluttering the terrace, it actually makes it feel bigger by creating a sense of journey from one end to the other. Other elements of hard landscaping include ▶



'All roof terraces are technically complex. They're like icebergs – two thirds of the work is underneath the surface, so you never see it' CHARLOTTE ROWE

HARD-LANDSCAPING ELEMENTS, SUCH AS GALVANISED STEEL PLANTERS, COMBINE WITH SOFT PLANTING AND SUBTLE LIGHTING TO CREATE A LAYERED, TEXTURAL FEEL IN THE EXPOSED SPACE. LIGHT, AIRY PLANTS, SUCH AS *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hamel' IN THE FOREGROUND, CREATE A SENSE OF MOVEMENT, WHILE THE SCULPTURAL OLIVE TREES DRAW THE EYE OUT TO THE EDGE OF THE TERRACE

ABOVE LEFT A MODERN, CEDAR STRUCTURE ACTS AS AN OUTDOOR DINING ROOM, DIVIDING THE SPACE AS WELL AS RESTRICTING AND FRAMING DIFFERENT VIEWS



A BRONZE-GLASS MIRROR ALSO ACTING AS A WATER FEATURE IS MOUNTED ON EITHER SIDE OF THE WOODEN STRUCTURE TO REFLECT THE SKYLINE BELOW. A SUBTLE LIGHTING SCHEME GIVES THE GARDEN AN INTIMATE CHARACTER AT NIGHT.

Uplighters throw a golden glow on to the olive trees, highlighting their sculptural branches, while tiny blue Swarovski-crystal lights set into the deck draw the eye from one end to the other



galvanised-steel containers in various sizes, all painted the same dark khaki shade to blend in with the decking. Two mirrors, one of which is also a water feature, are mounted on either side of the structure. These are made from bronzed glass – more subtle than standard mirror glass – which reflects the dramatic skyline in the background, once again giving the illusion of a larger space. The result is chic, extremely pleasing to the eye and misleadingly simple.

‘All roof terraces are technically complex,’ says Rowe. ‘They’re like icebergs – two thirds of the work is underneath the surface, so you never see it.’ The main restriction is weight, and there are various tricks of the trade to get around this. Soil is always the heaviest component of a roof terrace, with calculations based on wet soil. Here, a lightweight drainage material has been used under the soil in all the containers to reduce the overall weight. They are also lined with polystyrene, which acts as an insulator in winter and helps to keep the plants cool in summer. Roof terraces have very particular microclimates, and all the plants have to be able to withstand baking temperatures in summer as well as high winds during autumn and winter. The olive trees that draw the eye from the sitting-room doors to the far end of the terrace are doing well here, as is the evergreen climber *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, a useful plant for tough situations.

In the far corner of the terrace is another, more informal seating area, cocooned by aromatic herbs – lemon balm, thyme, origanum and chamomile. At night the garden comes alive in a different way with a subtle lighting scheme. Uplighters throw a golden glow on to the olive trees, highlighting their sculptural branches, while tiny blue Swarovski-crystal lights set into the deck draw the eye from one end to the other. As dusk falls, the garden takes on a more intimate, inward-looking character, although the twinkling lights of London below give a constant sense of belonging to the city. As the owner puts it: ‘You really feel in the middle of life out here.’

■ Charlotte Rowe Garden Design
 www.charlotterowe.com

SEVEN STARTER POINTS

Essential advice if you want to make your own rooftop paradise.

1 KNOW HOW

A vegetated roof, living roof or eco-roof is partially or completely covered in vegetation that is planted over an existing roof structure.

2 LANDSCAPING

Having a limited space calls for careful design. No single type of green roof works for all buildings and climates. Think endemic planting.

3 TYPES OF ROOFTOP GARDENS

There are three types of rooftop gardens:

- **Intensive rooftop gardens** replicate ground-level gardens. They have a growing medium depth of 200mm or more and are normally installed over concrete roof decks.

- **Extensive rooftop gardens** are covered with low-growing plants, with a growing medium depth of less than 200mm.

- **Biodiverse rooftop gardens** recreate pre-existing ground eco-systems. They are designed with specific biodiversity objectives in mind, such as attracting birdlife.

4 PRACTICAL FACTORS

The types of plants that can be grown on your roof is limited to the load it can withstand. The building and roof must be engineered to carry an extra load of watered soil and plants – consider both construction and building foundations.

5 IRRIGATION

Drip irrigation works well, as roof gardens tend to be breezy. A tap somewhere on the roof is useful for cleaning purposes.

6 SOIL AND FEED

Plants need regular feed applications, as roots have limited space to grow.

7 PREVAILING WEATHER

Roof gardens are more exposed to the elements than ground-level gardens. Consider the average temperature, wind direction and velocity in summer and winter, and glare from reflective surfaces.



PLANTING TIPS

Keep views open with low planting restricted to the perimeter, to ensure more space for seating. Choose hardy, water-wise, wind-resistant plants. Olive trees are ideal for rooftop gardens as they don't mind the wind and sun, and can live quite happily in restricted containers. Aromatic herbs such as chamomile, rosemary, sage and thyme will add a sensory layer to the space.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT PENNISETUM 'TALL TAILS' DOES WELL IN FULL SUN; AEONIUM 'KIWI' IS HARDY AND WATERWISE; ALLIUM COWANII IS A LOCAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE ALLIUMS GROWN OVERSEAS



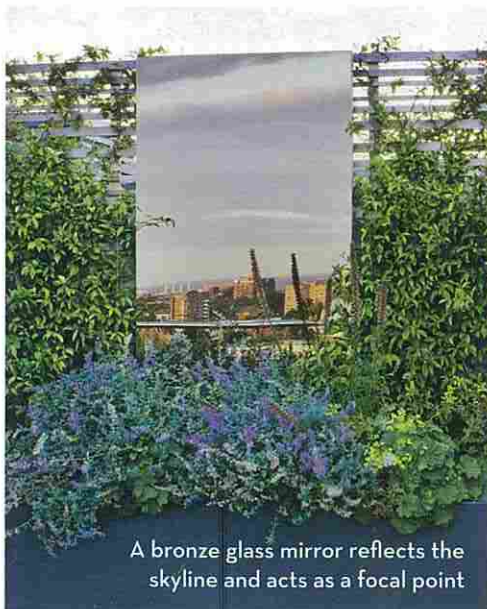
GOOD PLANT CHOICES

Agapanthus spp, *Bulbine frutescens* *Diets bicolor*, *D. grandiflora*, *Echeveria elegans* *Euphorbia*, *Gaura lindheimeri*, *G. floribunda*, *Strelitzia reginae*, *Strelitzia 'Mandela's Gold'*, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *Tulbachia violacea*.



KEY ELEMENTS

- A good drainage system*
- A high-quality waterproofing and root repellent system*
- A lightweight growing medium and filter cloth*
- Bespoke pots and made-to-measure built-in planters*



A bronze glass mirror reflects the skyline and acts as a focal point

CALL IN THE EXPERTS

STRUCTURE

Safety is key. Consult an engineer if you are converting an existing space into a roof garden. If provision was not originally made for a high-rise garden, the outer walls – rather than the centre of the roof – need to bear the weight of the various structures. New structures can be designed with the roof garden in mind.

DESIGN

Joburg-based company, Rooftop Systems, offers the following tips for designing a rooftop garden: 'Developing a green roof involves creating "contained" green space,' according to Justin Witten from Rooftop Systems. Green-roof systems can be integrated, with drainage layers, filter cloth and growing plants that have already been prepared in moveable, interlocking grids. Or each component can be installed separately.

PLANNING

Plan to make some shade for you and your plants. Look at how the sun strikes the garden. Also plan for privacy if you need it.

CONTACTS

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📍 www.rooftoplandscapes.co.za